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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 43rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 17 April 2002, at 10.05 a.m.

Chairperson:	Mr. LEWALTER (Vice-Chairperson)	(Germany)
later:	Mr. JAKUBOWSKI (Chairperson)	(Poland)

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(b) DISAPPEARANCES AND SUMMARY EXECUTIONS

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* Items which the Commission has decided to consider together.

In the absence of Mr. Jakubowski (Poland), Mr. Lewalter (Germany), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:

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(agenda item 11) (continued)

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

1. Mr. REYES RODRIGUEZ (Observer for Colombia) said that his delegation rejected some of the statements that had been made in relation to agenda item 11. It was very serious that the Commission was being used as a forum for making sweeping and far from objective statements discrediting an entire country. It would be more useful if the international community were to cooperate more efficiently to combat the money laundering used to finance acts of violence against the civilian population of his country.

2. Mr. ONG (Observer for Singapore) said that the allegations by the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre were unfounded. Singapore offered all its citizens the opportunity to speak freely at the Speakers' Corner provided that they registered their intent first. The rules prohibited speeches on religion so as to prevent religious or racial unrest. In response to the allegations that defamation cases were often brought against opposition leaders, he said that Singapore's laws and Constitution enshrined the freedom of speech and expression. As in all democratic societies, however, that freedom was subject to libel laws. The judiciary was not biased and members of the Opposition had won some defamation cases.

3. The non-governmental organization (NGO) in question had also asserted that a recent amendment to the Broadcasting Authority Act was a means of stifling scrutiny of the Singaporean Government by the foreign media and on the Internet. The amendment had been

made so as to allow the Government to act against any foreign broadcasting service interfering in the domestic politics of Singapore. In fact, other countries including Western countries recognized the need for such legal safeguards to prevent external interference.

4. Mr. JALLAL (Observer for Egypt) said that he wished to set the record straight regarding the Baha'i community in Egypt. The Egyptian Constitution guaranteed freedom of belief and expression for all, however there was a difference between freedom of belief and illegal acts that ran counter to general law and order in society. The Baha'i community had propagated publications defaming Islam and attacked the highest religious authorities in Egypt. Similarly, Law No. 263 (1960) relating to the dismantling of the Baha'i meeting houses did not violate the right to freedom of belief because it did not threaten the Baha'i community's freedom of belief, but only prohibited meeting houses whose rituals contravened Egypt's rule of law.

5. The Government did not interfere with the press or mass media either because they enjoyed freedom and independence under the Constitution. As part of its ongoing cooperation with the human rights mechanisms, his Government had responded to the queries of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression regarding the arrest of Baha'i community members and wished to reiterate its commitment to freedom of expression and belief in accordance with its Constitution and laws.

6. Mr. KRISHNAMRA (Thailand) said that the Asian Legal Resource Centre had referred to the case of 17 bodies found in Mae Lamao River and Moei River in the Tak province of Thailand. Appropriate national processes were under way to investigate the matter and to bring those responsible to justice; the results would be made public in due course. His Government was improving protection for all illegal migrants and providing legal channels for the recruitment of foreign labour so as to ensure its sustainable protection.

7. Mr. OULD TIJANI (Observer for Mauritania) said that Mauritania was a democratic country where all institutions were allowed to operate with transparency, a fact which had been seen and confirmed by some NGOs but deliberately ignored by others. His people were proud of their institutions and democracy and lived in a country where there was a high turnout for elections, healthy and democratic competition between the political parties in power and in opposition, a dynamic civil society and an independent press.

8. Mr. AHMAD JAZRI (Malaysia) said that his country needed an Internal Security Act to maintain peace and stability. The Act was a legislative instrument passed by the Malaysian parliament and applied only when peace and unity, which were vital for the continued economic and social growth of the country, were under threat. Since its coming into force, the Internal Security Act had been applied by the Government to counter threats to economic sustainability and national security and to maintain national unity. Contrary to the assertion by the Aliran Kesedaran Negara-National Consciousness Movement, all prisoners detained under the Act had access to lawyers and to medical treatment. The Malaysian people enjoyed high standards of human rights but could only continue to do so if peace and stability were maintained in the country.

9. Mr. HILALE (Observer for Morocco) said that he had hoped to receive some information in Algeria's right of reply the day before concerning the plight of the 1,362 Moroccans detained in the Tindouf prison camp but he had been disappointed. In November 2001, Algeria had proposed a partition of the Western Sahara as a solution to its conflict with Morocco. He wondered what had become of Algeria's ardent defence of the right to self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara.

10. His Government would not accept the proposal for partition because it was synonymous with instability, violation of human rights and the separation of tribes, families and individuals. Thousands of Moroccans were being held hostage in the Tindouf camps and Algeria wished to use them as pawns in exchange for natural resources and access to the Atlantic Ocean. The plight of the Moroccan detainees in Algerian prison camps was an international concern and the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the European Union had all demanded their immediate release. Algeria's lack of response constituted a flagrant violation of international and humanitarian law.

11. Ms. MINA (Observer for Cyprus) said that Turkey had a legal and moral responsibility towards the families of missing persons who had disappeared during and after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, yet it had never investigated those disappearances. If it wished to demonstrate its commitment to human rights it should take concrete steps. In the first place, it should provide information on the fate of the Greek Cypriots included in the list of prisoners provided by the Turkish forces to the ICRC who were still missing.

12. The Government and people of the Republic of Cyprus had been waiting 28 years for Turkey to cooperate in efforts to respect the human rights of the missing and their families. She hoped that the Government of Turkey would follow and abide by the principles and values of the Commission in the search for a solution to the problem of missing persons in Cyprus, a purely humanitarian issue.

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE:

(a) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

(agenda item 12) (continued) (E/CN.4/2002/80 and 81, E/CN.4/2002/82-E/CN.6/2002/6, E/CN.4/2002/83 and Add.1-3 and 133, E/CN.4/2002/136-E/CN.6/2002/8 and E/CN.4/2002/173; E/CN.4/2002/NGO/2, 33, 34, 43, 60, 61, 80-83, 98, 99, 116, 119, 127, 149, 167, 201 and 202)

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (continued) (E/CN.4/2002/84-88 and 133; E/CN.4/2002/NGO/8, 12, 17, 33, 34, 44, 102, 108, 118, 168 and 202; CRC/C/103, 108 and 111; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/4; A/56/342-S/2001/852)

13. Mr. VEGA (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, said that, together with the European Union, the Group had submitted a draft resolution on the rights of the child (E/CN.4/2002/L.68) which was currently being negotiated with all delegations and had already secured the support of over 70 of the States participating in the Commission's session. It had the same structure as that of the previous year since the draft resolution was an

"omnibus" one, combining a number of points relating to the child. For the first time, there were references to the social and cultural rights of the child. The operative part incorporated a number of new paragraphs under separate headings.

14. The Group attached great importance to the forthcoming special General Assembly session on children. There was no link, however, between the draft resolution and the special session. The draft resolution related to mechanisms for promoting and protecting the rights of the child while the special session appeared so far to be merely a declaration of political will. Nevertheless, approval by the Commission of the draft resolution would be a major contribution to the special session of the General Assembly and the Group hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

15. Ms. GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada) said that it was essential to integrate the human rights of women into the work of the Commission and throughout the United Nations system. Systematic violations of women's and girls' human rights were a strong indicator of the existence of broader violations in countries and the collapse of societies. The treaty bodies played a pivotal role in ensuring the promotion and protection of women's human rights and it was therefore important to support their work. Similarly, cooperation with regional intergovernmental bodies and civil society was also important.

16. Her delegation welcomed the recent initiative by the institution Rights and Democracy which had brought together the Special Rapporteurs on women's rights from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, with a resultant Joint Declaration reaffirming their commitment to international standards of women's rights. It was also pleased to see that the joint work plan between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women was continuing and was appreciative of its efforts to monitor progress in the work of treaty bodies in integrating gender. Her delegation also welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (E/CN.4/2002/83 and Add.1-3) and particularly her detailed analysis of violence against women in the family and the attention she paid to violence impacting on women's and girls' reproductive health.

17. Despite the existence of international standards condemning violence against women and the obligation of the State to prevent acts of gender-based violence, such violence was still rampant. Moreover, negative social attitudes and discriminatory practices towards women and girls worldwide inhibited progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against them. It was necessary to understand and address the root causes of such violence, develop and improve prevention strategies and establish legislative and other measures to address the violence. Although progress had been made both within the Commission and across the United Nations system, much remained to be done to achieve gender equality and the full and equal enjoyment by all of human rights.

18. Mrs. DINH THI MINH HUYEN (Viet Nam) said that, although the Charter of the United Nations reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women, it was a sad fact that full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights was still far from being a reality. The principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women in all human rights was a stated

goal in the Constitution and law of her country. Viet Nam was a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and was doing its utmost to carry out its obligations under that Convention and had reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2001.

19. The year 2002 had already seen two significant events for women in Viet Nam: the Government's adoption of a "National Strategy for Advancement of Vietnamese Women for 2001-2010" and the holding of the Ninth National Women's Congress in Hanoi. The Congress demonstrated her Government's strong commitment to the realization of the principles of equality and non-discrimination between men and women in Viet Nam.

20. Over the previous decade, Vietnamese women had made a remarkable contribution to the reduction of poverty and had also done much to help universalize primary education and eradicate illiteracy. However, as in other countries, violence against women and the trafficking of women and girls continued. Such crimes should be vigorously fought everywhere, and joint efforts and cooperation by countries were required for the purpose.

21. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Viet Nam had recently ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In February 2001, her Government had adopted a National Programme of Action for the Vietnamese Child 2001-2010 which set basic and specific targets relating to the child to be attained in health, nutrition, clean water, education, culture, recreation and protection from risks.

22. Ms. JANJUA (Pakistan) said that some of the most spectacular human rights developments in Pakistan in recent years had been registered in the field of women's rights, including the empowerment of women through their election to local bodies. Under the devolution plan, 33 per cent of seats were reserved for women in elections at the municipal and district levels. The Government had also taken steps to enhance the representation of women in provincial and federal legislatures.

23. Other positive developments had included the ratification by Pakistan of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration; the amendment of the Pakistan Citizenship Act to remove discrimination between the sexes; the launch of a family protection programme to provide social, legal and administrative support to women in distress; the creation of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women; enhancement of women's quotas in employment; the launch of the Women in Distress Fund and the provision of micro-credit to women.

24. Pakistan had also seen many positive developments in relation to the rights of the child over the previous two years, including the raising of the age of applicability of the death penalty to 18 years, bringing it into line with the country's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It had also ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

25. Much more needed to be done, however, to give the children of Pakistan every opportunity to grow into healthy, educated, productive and responsible adults. There was no lack of will, but there was a lack of resources.

26. Similarly, her Government realized that, without full utilization of the capabilities and capacities of the women of Pakistan, national development would not be possible. Her Government intended therefore to continue to devote all available resources to ensuring that the emancipation and empowerment of women in Pakistan became an irreversible phenomenon.

27. Mr. PÉREZ-VILLANUEVA y TOVAR (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that, since the foundation of the United Nations there had been great advances in the recognition of women's rights. The adoption in 1979 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), followed by its Optional Protocol in 1999 had represented a great step forward.

28. Despite the progress achieved in the legal field, however, many women and girls still did not enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men and boys. They still faced many discriminatory practices, based not only on gender but on such grounds as race, colour, family status, national or ethnic origin, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, birth or sexual orientation. Women and girls of indigenous origin or those belonging to minorities could find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. The Union would like to highlight, therefore, the crucial role played by CEDAW. It called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention and the Optional Protocol and to reconsider and withdraw any reservations.

29. The fight against violence to women, in both the public and the private sphere, must become a cornerstone of States' policies. The Union expressed its gratitude to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and urged all States to collaborate fully with her.

30. Harmful traditional or customary practices, including female genital mutilation, early forced marriage and so-called "honour crimes" were serious violations of women's rights. States had an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish such acts of violence and to provide protection to the victims. In no case could social, cultural or religious factors be invoked as justification for such violations. The Union thus welcomed and supported the extension of the mandate and the work of the Sub-Commission's Special Rapporteur on traditional practices affecting the health of women and the girl child and urged States to cooperate with her in the performance of her mandate.

31. Trafficking in women and girls for the purposes of commercial and sexual exploitation was one of the most common forms of violence worldwide. The Union called on Governments to take the political and practical measures necessary to protect and empower the victims of trafficking, to prosecute traffickers and to prevent and punish the use of new information and communication technologies for the purpose of trafficking. Governments should also sign and ratify the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols.

32. The Union paid special attention to the situation of women and girls in armed conflicts. States in conflict should take the specific needs of women and girls into consideration. The Statute of the International Criminal Court provided that acts of sexual violence in armed conflicts constituted grave violations of international humanitarian law and, in particularly serious cases, war crimes and crimes against humanity. All States should incorporate the Statute and its principles into their national legislation.

33. In most societies, the inadequate representation of women in the decision-making process, was an obstacle to gender equality and development. It was a basic democratic requirement that the level of female representation in decision-making bodies should reflect the proportion of women in the population. Governments should therefore continue to work for women's full enjoyment of their rights and for the elimination of all forms of discrimination in political and public life.

34. The Union called on Governments to ensure women's equal access to and control over economic resources, without discrimination. In that context, it welcomed the International Conference on Financing for Development and the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development.

35. The Union firmly believed that education could eradicate stereotypes and prejudices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of one sex over the other and could change men and women's social and cultural behaviour patterns.

36. In the field of health, efforts should be intensified to ensure universal access to basic health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, as well as protection against HIV/AIDS, which was increasingly affecting women and girls. Women had the right to decide freely and responsibly on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive rights, free from any coercion, discrimination or violence, as stated in the Beijing Platform for Action. Governments should respect and guarantee women's full enjoyment of those rights.

37. The Union wished to stress the important role played by civil society, NGOs and, in particular, women's organizations in the promotion of gender equality, defence of women's rights and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It commended the efforts made to advance gender mainstreaming and equality and to promote women's rights in all the mechanisms, activities and programmes of the United Nations system.

38. Equality between men and women was a fundamental value of the European Union, as clearly stated in the Amsterdam Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. To date, five Programmes of Action for the promotion of equal opportunities had been set up. Furthermore, as stated at the recent Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Women, the eradication of gender violence was a Union priority. Several initiatives had been adopted. States still faced many challenges, however, in achieving the effective implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination against women and girls.

39. Turning to agenda item 13, he urged all States that would be represented at the General Assembly special session on children, to work closely together to ensure that the outcome was as fruitful and beneficial for children as possible. The Convention on the Rights of

the Child was the foremost international instrument on children's rights, affirming the special safeguards to which they were entitled as persons with rights and as vulnerable and dependent human beings. The Committee on the Rights of the Child played a key role in that regard. The Union favoured the broadest possible interpretation and application of the rights of the child, as embodied in the Convention, and called on States that had not yet done so to ratify and implement it.

40. The right to education was recognized by many international instruments. About 130 million children, however, had no access to primary education. Education could be used to combat discrimination, as had been stated at the International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination, held in November 2001. The Union urged all States to make the right to education a reality. It commended the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and encouraged her to continue her work.

41. Poverty remained one of the most serious causes of concern in efforts to promote children's rights. The Union appealed to States to continue to devote special attention to the needs of children when implementing the Millennium Declaration which had, inter alia, set the target that, by 2015, all children everywhere in the world would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

42. The United Nations, all States, and NGOs should press ahead with their efforts to protect children infected by AIDS, to oppose any form of discrimination against them and to ensure that they enjoyed all their rights.

43. The Union was pleased that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had made violence against children within the family and schools the focus of its day of general discussion in September 2001.

44. The Union welcomed the increasing number of ratifications of ILO Conventions No. 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment and No. 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. It urged ILO to continue its work of helping children in vulnerable situations.

45. The impact of armed conflict on children was particularly harsh. The Union thus set great store by the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of the NGOs. It also welcomed the relevant Security Council resolutions.

46. In 2001, 11 million refugees - almost half the total number under the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - had been under 18. The Union was particularly concerned by allegations of abuse of refugee children. UNHCR would undoubtedly be able to clarify the situation and take all the necessary steps.

47. The Union welcomed the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

48. The Union urged States to speed up the process of ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which defined the conscription or enlistment of children under 15 or their active participation in hostilities as a war crime.

49. Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) said that the Ugandan Constitution and the 1996 Children's Statute provided the basic legal framework for the promotion and protection of children's rights in his country. Article 34 of the Constitution provided that children had a right to a basic education, which was the responsibility of the State and the parents. They were entitled to protection from social or economic exploitation and were not to be employed in work that was likely to be hazardous, that interfered with their education or was harmful to their physical or mental development. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the National Council for Children and several NGOs had played an active role in programmes to achieve those ends.

50. Under the Universal Primary Education programme, which had been launched in 1997, education had become accessible to about 90 per cent of the country's children. Primary school enrolment had increased from 2.9 million in 1996 to over 7 million in 2002.

51. His delegation wished to endorse the concluding observations contained in paragraphs 70-95 of the report by the High Commissioner (E/CN.4/2002/86), concerning the abduction of children from northern Uganda. His Government was already implementing some of the recommendations contained therein. For example, security for the protected villages had been improved and steps taken to protect the local population in consultation with civil society organizations and leaders. Full diplomatic relations had been re-established between Uganda and the Sudan.

52. Parliament had passed an Amnesty Act which recognized that many of the combatants of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) were themselves victims of abdu tion and coercion and that reconciliation in the north and in Uganda as a whole was necessary for peace in the country. The Amnesty Commission, established to implement the Act, needed adequate support and funding. His delegation called on the international community to support the process, for which the Amnesty Commission was shortly to release a strategic plan, guidelines and comprehensive budget so as to allow targeted responses to the needs of returnees.

53. In March 2002, government and NGO representatives from Uganda and the Sudan had met in Entebbe to update contingency plans for the expected return of hundreds of abducted children. The Amnesty Commission, which had played an active part in the meeting, was planning to visit Juba in southern Sudan and establish a presence there to assist persons wishing to return to Uganda. In northern Uganda, traditional and religious leaders had played a key role in building confidence in the amnesty process and in signalling the community's willingness to receive and integrate persons previously engaged in insurgency. In that context, he expressed his delegation's appreciation for the support of the donor community and appealed for continued assistance for the development of the region, since its prosperity was closely tied to peace and security in northern Uganda.

54. The significant improvement in bilateral relations between Uganda and the Sudan would hasten the process of finding a lasting solution to the problem of the abduction of children from northern Uganda. Several high-level meetings had been held over the past few months and the Government appreciated the cooperation it had received from the Government of the Sudan to contain problems caused by the LRA in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

55. Gender balance and fair representation of all marginalized groups was a key principle enshrined in the Constitution, article 32 of which provided for affirmative action to redress historic imbalances between men and women. The efforts made since the Government had become a signatory to CEDAW had yielded tangible results for Ugandan women, whose status had steadily improved. There were 51 women members of Parliament, 18 per cent of the total, a figure that was higher than in most countries of the region. On the basis of that modest achievement, efforts were being made to allow women to play a greater role in the country's legislative process. The Deputy Speaker was a woman, as was the Vice-President. There were 5 women cabinet ministers and 11 ministers of state. The Deputy Chief Justice and 16 of the 68 High Court judges were women. A substantial number of women were heads of government ministries and departments and the situation would steadily improve as society marched towards the goal of gender equality.

56. Uganda's legal system had been reinforced to provide protection for girls. The age of consent had been raised to 18 and defilement was treated as a very serious offence attracting long prison sentences. Traditional practices that were harmful to the well-being of the girl child had also been outlawed.

57. Ms. MAHOUVE (Cameroon) said that the all but universal signature and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child were proof of the international community's growing interest in children. Children were vulnerable and had to be protected. They were also individuals who should be able to exercise all their human rights, including the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives within the family, the school and the community. The special General Assembly session on children would provide the opportunity to reaffirm the rights-based approach to children and to decide on the way forward.

58. Children in the twenty-first century faced increased poverty and inequality, a proliferation of armed conflicts and violence, the deadly spread of HIV/AIDS and continuing discrimination against women and girls. Substantial progress could, however, be made within a generation, if the international community invested properly in its children. Each child must be provided with a basic education of good quality and an adequate level of health care. Young people should be given an environment enabling them to fulfil their potential. The two Optional Protocols to the Convention, on involvement of children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which Cameroon had signed in October 2001, were crucial, as was ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, which it was currently in the process of ratifying. Cameroon had acceded to almost all the international legal instruments relating to the rights of the child.

59. Specific strategies adopted included the National Plan of Action, launched in 1991, which gave priority to infants; basic education for all children; the provision of drinking water and sanitation; improved health training for outlying areas; the protection of children in difficult

situations; the fight against HIV/AIDS; and social education. Her delegation had also participated in the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on children.

60. Her Government supported all initiatives to combat trafficking in children, work by children, the sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes and children's involvement in armed conflicts. It was working closely with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and had been involved in various subregional, regional and international initiatives such as the ILO-UNICEF workshop in July 2000, the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in December 2001 and the Subregional Libreville Consultation on the development of strategies to fight child trafficking for exploitative labour purposes in West and Central Africa. Although Cameroon had not yet been affected by sexual tourism, legislation regulating any tourist activity that put children at risk had been adopted.

61. Considerable progress had been made in implementing her Government's commitments stemming from the 1990 World Summit for Children. Much, however, remained to be done. The political will to carry out economic and social reform had encountered a number of obstacles. The country's democratization and the structural adjustment programmes required to counter the economic crisis had not been conducive to profound social change. The 20/20 initiative, under which a specific proportion of the budget and of official development assistance (ODA) was allocated to basic social services, had largely been abandoned. Children's Day was, however, celebrated annually on 11 February and Cameroon had had a children's parliament since 1998.

62. Mr. LI Baodong (China) said that, as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, China had always attached primary importance to the protection of children's rights. It conscientiously implemented its obligations under the Convention and actively participated in other relevant international instruments. It had signed the two Optional Protocols and was currently engaged in the ratification of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts was also under positive consideration.

63. The Fifth Ministerial Consultative Meeting on the Development of the Child for East Asia and the Pacific Region, sponsored by his Government in preparation for the special General Assembly session on children, had culminated in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, a strategic document formulated to guide the development of children in the region for the next decade. It was to be hoped that the special session would come up with some useful measures to improve the situation of children and promote their development.

64. Safeguarding children's rights would help to ensure the sustainable and sound development of humanity. His Government had therefore formulated the National Programme for the Development of the Child for the 1990s, with the purpose of providing the basic outlines for their development. By and large, all the objectives had been achieved: significant progress had been made in lowering child mortality, increasing the vaccination rate and reducing child malnutrition. In May 2002, the National Programme for the Development of the Child 2001-2010 had been promulgated with even higher objectives and a wider scope.

65. Although considerable progress had been made, the remaining challenges would not be overlooked. Children living in poverty, for example, needed more help. China would spare no effort in living up to its commitments to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

66. Ms. PAIK Ji-ah (Republic of Korea) said that the eradication of all forms of violence against women was crucial to the protection of their rights. Their vulnerability to violence increased dramatically in times of armed conflict or occupation. Consequently, her delegation urged all States to implement the recommendations contained in the reports of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (E/CN.4/2002/83 and Add.1-3).

67. Her delegation was seriously concerned about the proliferation of trafficking in women and children. Early entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two Protocols would be an essential step in strengthening international cooperation to prevent and combat such crimes.

68. Despite the achievements since the 1990 World Summit for Children, countless children throughout the world remained the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. Her delegation hoped that the special session of the General Assembly would constitute another important milestone in the endeavour to build a world fit for children.

69. In that context, she stressed the importance of education, particularly the teaching of history. It was of the utmost importance that children were given a correct and accurate perception of history, otherwise there was a danger of the recurrence of past wrongdoings. In that connection, she drew attention to the recent establishment of the Korea-Japan Joint History Research Committee, which would make a substantial contribution to the teaching of history founded on truth.

70. Ms. IAMSUDHA (Thailand) said that her Government would work continuously to ensure that the advancement of women was covered not only by the Constitution but as a cross-cutting issue in the national development process.

71. Her delegation agreed with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women that, despite the progress made in many countries, violence against women deserved greater national and international concern and action. It occurred everywhere and posed a serious obstacle to women's development and thus to their country's development. In Thailand, steps had been taken to promote the role of the family as a necessary and integral part of society, to give greater recognition to the rights and status of women and to encourage partnership between the Government, civil society and the international organizations.

72. The police had set up centres for the protection of children, young people and women to coordinate assistance for those whose rights had been violated; female police officers had been specially trained and assigned to various police stations to work with female victims of violence; the Public Welfare Department operated two permanent hotlines and offered counselling and advisory services; a Centre to End Domestic Violence against Women, with representatives from academic institutions, NGOs and governmental organizations and involving doctors, psychiatrists, social welfare workers, police officers and public prosecutors, had been set up to work with male perpetrators for the purpose of reducing or ending domestic violence; and the

National Secretariat on Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong subregion had been set up to coordinate action within the subregion on prevention, capacity-building and the return of trafficked women and children. Centres had been established in various parts of the country for the benefit of victims of trafficking, irrespective of nationality.

73. Gender-based violence was a complex issue and improvements in legislation, law enforcement, the training of law enforcers, provision of shelters, counselling services and data collection would be required. Her Government was determined to strive for the protection and advancement of women, despite the country's financial constraints and the difficulty of the task. It also recognized that legal measures were not enough if people were not educated and thus attached great importance to awareness-raising activities as well as to formal and non-formal education. However, the Government's efforts alone would not suffice and the contribution of international organizations, NGOs, the media, all sectors of society and the family would be crucial.

74. Her Government's support for the empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming had led it to submit its candidature for membership of the Commission on the Status of Women at the next election in May 2002, since it was convinced that it would be able to make an active contribution to that Commission's work.

75. Ms. CEK (Croatia) said that States were obliged to eradicate through a process involving both education and legislation and policy cultural practices which condoned domestic violence. Croatian society was not immune to the prejudices and stereotypes that resulted in domestic violence and her Government was trying to adopt a coherent approach to the problem.

76. There was growing public awareness of the need to eliminate violence against women, including domestic violence, and, in 1997, marital rape had been defined as a criminal offence. In December 2001, a national policy for the promotion of gender equality and an action plan for the implementation of the policy had been adopted. The policy had been devised by a cooperative effort involving governmental institutions and civil society, especially non-governmental women's rights organizations. The action to be taken included the development of a national strategy to combat violence against women, examination of the laws which penalized violence against women, monitoring of the implementation of legislation, education for public officials, law-enforcement agents, and persons providing services and support to the victims, financial assistance for the victims and establishment of special police units to deal with cases of violence against women.

77. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on traffic in women and girls (E/CN.4/2002/80), she noted that it referred to numerous European initiatives, such as the Task Force on Trafficking established under the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Within the context of the Stability Pact's Anti-Trafficking Action Plan, her Government was preparing the national strategy to combat trafficking, which had emerged as a serious problem in the region and required effective international cooperation, harmonization of laws and coordination between States, NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. Her Government was determined to implement the provisions of international instruments in that area and to copy best practices.

78. It was regrettable that a few States had still not ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The protection of children should be accorded the highest priority by all Governments in order to ensure the universal implementation of children's rights. The entry into force of the two Optional Protocols had provided additional protection for children. Her Government was engaged in harmonizing its domestic legislation with the provisions of those instruments and expected to become a party to them during the special session of the General Assembly in May 2002, which would, it hoped, set new standards for the protection of childrens' rights.

79. She commended the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography who had identified the main problems and recommended mechanisms for addressing them. She expressed support for the idea of strengthening the capacity of local and international NGO networks and civil society so as to globalize the fight against the use of child soldiers everywhere.

80. All segments of society must work to create a better world for children. Standards had been defined and the next task was to implement them. The two Optional Protocols had merely opened the door to a better future; the children of the world were waiting for that future to become a reality.

81. Ms. BAGHLI (Algeria), having thanked the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for her report (E/CN.4/2002/83 and Add.1-3), expressed concern at the injustices which women still suffered. The international community must do more to guarantee the fundamental human rights of women which, despite greater awareness and the strengthening of international standards, continued to be violated, often with impunity.

82. Retrograde attitudes and sheer greed had contributed to one of the most worrying of phenomena, the traffic in women and girls, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2002/80). Efforts to study and comprehend that phenomenon should continue with a view to taking action to eliminate it. In that connection, her delegation fully supported the draft resolution submitted by the observer for the Philippines.

83. It was essential to take steps to prevent the ill-treatment and exploitation of women through legislative reforms which provided the tools to help women achieve their full potential. The important role played by women in society was universally acknowledged but, if women were to assume that role in full, Governments must guarantee them access to education and basic services. Women themselves must assert their right to participate in the political, social and economic life of their country and refuse to be exploited or victimized. In that context, she wished to pay tribute to the exemplary courage and will to live shown by the women of Afghanistan. Their determination to take control of their destiny and their enthusiasm for education showed that intelligence and will power would always triumph in the end.

84. The human rights and women's rights mechanisms of the United Nations system as well as NGOs and other associations of civil society played an important role in denouncing violations of women's rights. The process begun at Beijing in 1995 had the heavy responsibility of defining a well devised joint international programme to protect the dignity of women.

85. Ms. de ARMAS (Cuba) said that the growing gap between North and South was reflected in the situation of the world's women and children: two thirds of the 826 million persons who went hungry in the world were third-world women and children; 99.5 per cent of maternal deaths occurred in the third world; life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa was 30 years shorter than in the developed countries; 325 million children did not go to school; 11 million children under five died every year of avoidable causes and 500,000 were left permanently blind by vitamin A deficiency. For the more than 1.2 billion persons living in extreme poverty, more than two thirds of whom were women and children, the priority was not empowerment or women's rights or definition of childrens' rights, important though those might be, it was their very survival as human beings.

86. The poor countries could not be blamed for that tragic situation. They had not conquered and looted entire continents and were not responsible for colonialism, slavery or imperialism, of which they had been the victims. The efforts of the countries of the South must be complemented by a new climate of international cooperation based on a new economic and social order.

87. Cuba provided a model for a different way of life. The promotion of justice and equality could transform the situation of women and children and ensure full realization of their rights. Women in Cuba represented 43.6 per cent of the civil service, 32.3 per cent of persons occupying posts of responsibility at all levels of society, 27.62 per cent of parliament, 66.6 per cent of mid-level and higher-level technicians and professionals, 60 per cent of university students. Child mortality was 6.2 per thousand live births and children were vaccinated against 11 predictable diseases, as a result of which diphtheria, poliomyelitis, neonatal and infant tetanus, meningitis and tuberculosis had been eradicated.

88. Those results had been achieved despite the devastating effects on women and children of the heartless economic blockade imposed by the United States of America. Thanks to the political commitment of her Government and the humanistic nature of its social policies, all Cuban children had access to basic education, the ratio of teachers to the population was the highest in the world and efforts were continuing to reduce the average class size to 20. Her Government was furnishing computer training for even the youngest children, and promoting audiovisual teaching methods and had created an educational television channel, all free of charge.

89. In 1981, terrorist organizations based in Miami had introduced dengue fever into Cuba, causing the deaths of 101 children. The United States of America had, nevertheless, maintained its blockade and refused to allow insecticides and fumigation equipment to be shipped to Cuba. The additional cost and the delay in receiving those materials from other countries had certainly contributed to the number of deaths. There had also been an outbreak of haemorrhagic conjunctivitis - never before seen in the western hemisphere - which had affected women and children in particular and an outbreak of dysentery, never before seen in Cuba, near the United States base in Guantánamo, which had caused the death of 18 children.

90. Ms. POLO (Togo) said that, despite the progress made in many countries towards implementing the outcomes of the Beijing Conference, much remained to be done to guarantee the rights of women. Further concerted action and support was thus necessary on the part of the international community.

91. At the domestic level, her Government was currently reviewing 49 articles of the Code of the Individual and the Family. Projects and programmes had been undertaken to facilitate access by both urban and rural women to legal services, credit, health care and communication and information technologies and to involve them in efforts to protect the environment. Those programmes were being undertaken in the framework of the follow-up to a subregional workshop for women jurists, held in March 1998, on the theme of sex discrimination in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa which had been followed by a subregional workshop that had adopted a plan of action to promote women's access to legal services in 2000-2005. Her Government had also suggested that a strategy document be prepared on how to reduce inequality for women and children with a view to defining priorities for the elimination of poverty amongst women.

92. In that connection, she welcomed the Commission's efforts to give a high priority to the rights of children and recalled that the Millennium Summit had reaffirmed the international community's commitment to redoubling its efforts to ensure full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child throughout the world.

93. Her delegation welcomed the Commission's stance on the need to ensure protection of human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS. It also welcomed the entry into force of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The trafficking in and sexual exploitation of children were among the most outrageous violations of children's rights and seriously affected their healthy development and social integration. Her delegation fully supported the recommendations of the UNICEF workshop in October 2001 on trafficking in children in eight African countries, including Togo, as well as those of the World Organization against Torture conference in November 2001 on children, torture and other forms of violence and the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in December 2001.

94. Her Government was committed to strengthening human rights guarantees for children. A National Committee had been set up to ensure implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the authorities were collaborating actively with United Nations organs such as UNICEF and the relevant NGOs. Committees to combat trafficking of children and child labour had been established in February 2002 in six prefectures identified as problem areas to create greater awareness of the problem and identify the culprits. Efforts were also under way to eliminate female genital mutilation.

95. A new Children's Code had recently been adopted which brought together all the provisions relating to the status of the child so as to make them more accessible and ensure their compatibility with international standards. The measures adopted underscored her Government's commitment to protecting the rights of the child and she hoped that the special session of the General Assembly would provide an opportunity to take stock of the situation and adopt new initiatives to guarantee the rights of the child.

96. Mr. HARON (Sudan) said that his Government was developing a clear policy on the advancement of women and the incorporation of gender issues at all levels. The Constitution guaranteed women the right to hold public office, the Labour Code guaranteed women workers the same rights as men, protected them against dismissal for pregnancy or maternity, and guaranteed compensation for the death of a husband as well as two years maternity leave. Female genital mutilation was a criminal act and awareness campaigns were under way through the media and NGOs to prevent its practice. In that connection, he recognized the valuable work done by the Sudanese Committee against Harmful Traditions Affecting the Health of Women and Children.

97. Free primary education was provided even in camps for internally displaced persons and some 95 per cent of girl children received basic education. Women were represented at the decision-making levels of the executive and judiciary and a policy of economic enhancement for women through the encouragement of family enterprises had been established to increase women's incomes and promote their economic independence. Divisions for women had been established in certain ministries and would soon be established in others. The number of women's NGOs was increasing.

98. The civil war had taken a terrible toll of women and children and repatriation and resettlement plans were urgently needed. The re-establishment and strengthening of the Committee on the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children and the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission were important developments in promoting and protecting women's rights. His Government would maintain its commitment to women's rights and called on the international community to support its efforts.

99. Mr. Jakubowski (Poland) took the Chair.

100. Mr. WATANABE (Japan) expressed his Government's appreciation of the contributions made by the participants in the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Yokohama in December 2001. The Yokohama Global Commitment 2001, adopted unanimously, stated the participants' determination to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Commitment, which would serve as a guide for global activities to realize a world fit for children, would be a useful contribution to the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on children.

101. A top priority at the special session would be the fundamental right of children to education, identified as a major goal at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Nearly 120 million children of primary school age did not have access to education. He was, therefore, delighted that children in Afghanistan had been able to return to school on 23 March 2002. In December 2000, while the Taliban regime was still in power, his Government had contributed US$ 500,000 to a UNICEF project for girls' education and, since 11 September 2001, had strongly supported the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It had hosted the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in January 2002 and had contributed $27.4 million to UNICEF projects for children.

102. Turning to the situation in Africa, he recalled that his Government had hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) which had confirmed that there could be no peace and prosperity without a solution to Africa's problems. Accordingly, his Government had provided over $400 million in grants for core programmes involving basic education, health and safe water. As a result, some 310,000 African children would have access to basic education and 2.7 million people would have access to safe drinking water.

103. In the fields of health and the protection of children, under the banner of "human security", his Government placed a high priority on the eradication of polio which would be attainable in the near future. The declaration that polio had been eradicated in the western Pacific region, made in Kyoto in October 2000, had revitalized its commitment to the eradication of polio globally. In 2001, it had contributed approximately $50.3 million to polio eradication projects in nine countries in South-West Asia and Africa.

104. His Government, in partnership with other Governments, international organizations and civil society, would continue to work for children with a view to achieving the ultimate common goal: a world where children could grow up in happiness and safety.

105. Mr. SURI (India) said that although the international community had made significant advances in the field of women's rights, much remained to be done before those rights were fully realized everywhere.

106. His Government had declared 2001 to be Women's Empowerment Year, to ensure that women took their rightful place in the nation's social, political and economic life. The aim was to raise awareness of issues relating to women, improve their access to and control of resources and enhance their self-confidence and independence. A series of activities had been undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of a special task force.

107. Since the Commission's previous session, additional measures had been adopted to address the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, following her visit to India in November 2000, as contained in her report (E/CN.4/2001/73/Add.2). For example, the central and state authorities had been working in close cooperation to formulate and implement plans of action to combat trafficking in women and girls; proposed amendments to the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act had been finalized; steps were being taken to review the Indian Penal Code with regard to child protection; the National Commission for Women had recently held a seminar in response to the Special Rapporteur's comments on protective custody; a manual was being prepared to improve the judiciary's awareness of women's rights issues; and the Department of Women and Child Development was collecting data on the trafficking in women and girls.

108. The Constitution provided a specific framework for the protection, development and welfare of children. The adoption of the National Policy for Children in 1974 was a landmark development, ensuring adequate services for all children at all stages of their development. The Integrated Child Development Services Programme for children under 6 years old and expectant and nursing mothers had been launched in 1975 and continued to be the major governmental programme for early childhood survival and development. It was hoped that the programme would be universalized in 2002.

109. Action in the area of child health care, such as massive immunization campaigns, had significantly reduced the infant mortality rate over the years. A national programme was envisaged to address the problem of malnutrition among children.

110. In 1993, the Supreme Court had ruled that every child had the right to free education up to the age of 14 years. A constitutional amendment bill to that effect had already been passed by the lower house of Parliament and the "Education for All" campaign had been launched to achieve the goal. School enrolment at all levels had increased steadily since 1990.

111. The critical importance of the health, literacy and economic development of adolescent girls had been recognized by policy makers and would form the focal point of human resource development. Lastly, he said that his Government was determined to promote and protect the rights of the child not just in India but also around the world.

112. Mr. BICUDO (Brazil) said that, according to most international agreements, a child was any person under the age of 18. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was less precise, stating that a child meant every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the applicable law majority was attained earlier. In terms of deprivation of liberty, the United Nations Rules defined a minor as any person below 18 years of age. However, a suggestion had been made that the age of criminal majority should be reduced to 14 years in those countries where it was currently set at 18. Such a step would be counterproductive; imprisoning young people would simply contribute to the overcrowding of prisons, which were places for criminals, not for the rehabilitation of children.

113. UNICEF had recently reported that many of the objectives outlined at the 1990 World Summit for Children had not been achieved. The steps taken to improve the survival, development, protection and education of children had yielded mixed results.

114. The World Conference on Human Rights had reaffirmed the importance of ensuring the universality of human rights and had emphasized that measures should be adopted to achieve universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, there were many States that had still not ratified the Convention.

115. Children continued to be killed or maimed by landmines and in armed conflicts. It was essential, therefore, that States should ratify the Ottawa Convention and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

116. The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) had recently held a conference on children, torture and other forms of violence, which had highlighted that such practices continued to be widespread. The participants had urged the Commission to appoint a special rapporteur on violence against children, with due regard for the vulnerability of children in the field of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

117. Ms. WIJONO (Indonesia), having commended the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for her comprehensive report (E/CN.4/2002/83), which unfortunately confirmed that gender violence was becoming increasingly widespread, said that having a female President did not necessarily mean that women's rights were fully realized in the country concerned.

118. Indonesia had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had signed its Optional Protocol. Among the measures taken by her Government to combat gender discrimination, was the 2001-2004 National Action Plan, which incorporated a "zero tolerance" policy for acts of violence against women and included measures to protect victims. New legislation had been introduced to penalize the perpetrators of such violence.

119. The National Commission on Violence against Women, together with other national human rights institutions and NGOs, had coordinated their efforts to combat abuse, provide assistance to victims and conduct information campaigns. An increasing number of women's crisis centres, both private and Government-sponsored, provided services such as permanent hotlines, temporary shelters and medical assistance. Special police units had been trained to handle cases of violence against women and children.

120. Legal instruments and political commitments were essential but it was the effective empowerment of women themselves that would ultimately secure gender equality. Evidence suggested that inequality stemmed from poverty, yet the eradication of poverty was unlikely without the full participation of women. Education remained the key to women's empowerment.

121. Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, substantial progress had been made on paper, notably in the form ILO Convention No. 182, which banned the worst forms of child labour, and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which had been signed by Indonesia. However, the global statistics with regard to children still remained unacceptable. A commitment had to be made to meet the objectives of the World Summit. To that end, she looked forward to the forthcoming special General Assembly session on children.

122. In Indonesia, where children's rights had suffered from the impact of the economic crisis and the tensions in some provinces, her Government was trying to strengthen cooperation with civil society in a bid to improve the situation. Despite limited resources, improvements were being made to the systems of education, health care and social services. A National Commission for Child Protection had been established with a mandate to protect children from all forms of abuse. A child protection bill was being drafted to detail the obligations towards children of parents, families, the community and the Government.

123. Trafficking in women and children often went hand in hand with commercial sexual exploitation and stemmed largely from economic difficulties. Measures to combat it should thus aim primarily at eradicating poverty, a goal that called for increased ODA. The fact that trafficking took place both within and across borders made it difficult to control without concerted international cooperation. Any remedial action should address the question of the demand in destination countries. Indonesia was both a source country and a transit country for illegal migrants and attached great importance to resolving that issue.

124. Mr. IBRAHIM (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country's domestic legislation enhanced the rights of women in conformity with international instruments. It also took into account the physical characteristics of women, for example the labour law prohibited women from engaging in hard labour. The Constitution prohibited discrimination against women and

encouraged their participation in the economic, social and political life of the country. In fact, women were an important part of the workforce, representing 50 per cent of workers in the education sector and 40 per cent in the executive, administrative and political sectors.

125. The Women's Society was one of the most popular organizations in his country. Its objective was to enhance and promote the rights of women at both the both national and international levels. Various ministries organized awareness programmes to enhance the rights of women: for example, a recent campaign had aimed at improving control of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Programmes and seminars had also been organized to reduce illiteracy, improve the care of newborn babies and encourage the social integration of disabled women. His Government also attached great importance to women living in rural areas. Efforts were being made to discourage early marriage and random divorce and to improve the status of those women.

126. His Government attached great importance to the rights of the child. The Ministry of Health provided extensive care for pregnant women and children, which had led to a reduction in the infant mortality rate. The Ministry of Information had designed a series of television and radio programmes to raise children's awareness of their rights and to guide them in their future choices.

127. A law had been introduced making education free at all levels. Computer science had been introduced into the curriculum as a major subject and compulsory education had been extended to the age of 16. Efforts were being made to integrate disabled children into mainstream schools.

128. Criminal law imposed severe penalties on those who perpetrated sexual violence against children, abducted children and used child labour in breach of the ILO conventions. Children were not recruited into the army in his country. Lastly, he reiterated his Government's commitment to cooperate with the international community in all areas pertaining to the rights of women and children.

129. Mr. AL-ARADI (Bahrain) said that his country's legislation promoted and protected the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. All laws were in conformity with the Constitution and were based on the notion that children would have an Islamic upbringing. Bahrain had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been incorporated in o domestic law. His Government was committed to its full implementation. Bahrain had also acceded to the Arab Convention No. 18 of 1986 on child labour.

130. His Government was doing its utmost to implement the human rights instruments to which it was a party. The National Committee for Children had recently been established as a mechanism to monitor the implementation of legislation relating to children. NGOs also played an important role in promoting the rights of the child and in implementing the relevant legislation. Various new laws had been passed, such as the custody law and a law on assistance to needy families.

131. Measures had been adopted to provide care for orphans and for children with special needs. If an orphan's origin was unknown, the child could be granted Bahraini nationality. A committee had been established to provide special teaching for gifted children. A plan of action had been introduced with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) to address the physical and psychological needs of young people. A WHO expert had visited the country with a view to implementing a comprehensive plan to protect neglected children.

132. In conclusion, he said that his country had submitted its initial report (CRC/C/11/Add.24) to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention. The report had been discussed at a Committee meeting in January 2002, on which occasion his Government had reiterated its commitment to respect all the rights enshrined in the Convention.

133. Mr. MINDUA KESIA-MBE (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his country had ratified CEDAW in 1985 and had since taken part in all regional and international conferences on the issue. His Government was endeavouring to act on the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It had adopted various measures to prevent discrimination, including the creation of various national mechanisms, such as the National Council for Women, which worked with the appropriate NGOs.

134. A new draft Constitution included provisions to prevent discrimination against women. The Government took a gender-based approach in all development plans. Women had been eligible to vote since the country had gained its independence in 1960, and occupied 30 per cent of Government posts. A National Action Plan had been put into place with a view to promoting the rights of women.

135. In the field of health, efforts had been made to train midwives, vaccinate children and pregnant women and improve their diets, prevent female genital mutilation and control sexually transmitted diseases. HIV/AIDS continued to be a source of concern, particularly with respect to pregnant women who had been raped by rebel soldiers as a method of warfare.

136. With regard to education, his Government guaranteed equal access to education and to professional and vocational training. Efforts were being made to reduce the illiteracy rate among women, which stood at 13 per cent in urban areas and 60 per cent in rural areas. UNICEF had helped to implement training programmes to teach girls a profession. Unfortunately, the embargo imposed against his country by the international community since 1990 and the difficult economic, social and political situation exacerbated by the war had led to a decline in the number of girls attending school.

137. Women were responsible for 5 per cent of registered businesses and 85 per cent of informal businesses. The Ministry of Agriculture had created an agricultural advisory unit to provide women in rural areas with access to appropriate technology.

138. The war had rendered fruitless any efforts by his Government to prevent the feminization of poverty. Furthermore, women and girls in occupied areas were subjected to brutal treatment by rebel troops. He urged the international community to help to restore peace in his country.

139. Mr. HERNANDEZ BASAVE (Mexico) said that over half the population of his country were women and approximately 35 per cent of Mexicans were under the age of 18. His Government thus attached particular importance to issues concerning those two major segments of the population. In fact, it was convinced that improving the human rights situation of women and children was essential for the democratic life of Mexico. The constitutional reform of August 2001 had included, for the first time, a ban on discrimination on the basis of gender and age.

140. The establishment of a National Institute for Women and the launch of the National Programme for the Equality and Non-Discrimination of Women 2001-2006 had the same objectives as those set in Beijing and renewed at the special session of the General Assembly in 2000, namely, promoting and enhancing the conditions that guaranteed non-discrimination and equal opportunities for women, and ensuring them full enjoyment of their rights and equal participation in political, cultural, social and economic life.

141. The National Development Plan provided for the needs of children in the field of health and education and addressed problems such as violence and family breakdown.

142. His Government's human rights policy was designed to harmonize domestic legislation with international standards and Mexico had recently ratified the Optional Protocol to CEDAW as well as the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.